ORAL HISTORY #40

INTERVIEWEE: Senator John Sherman Cooper

Cates: Hugh Cates. It's April the 29th, 1971. I'm in the office of United States Senator John Sherman Cooper. Senator Cooper is a Republican from the state of Kentucky. Senator Cooper, would you mind just stating some of your recollections or impressions of the late Senator Richard Brevard Russell?

Cooper: I first met Senator Russell in 1947 when I came to the Senate for a two-year term. I was defeated twice. I've been back in the Senate several times. I served for 15 years. I knew him like all Senators knew him, from observing him on the Floor of the Senate, admiring him for his dignity, for his presence, his authority and his tremendous power and influence in debate. I'll just say a commonplace, but it is correct that he's always considered as an outstanding power, force in the Senate.

Cates: Senator, excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt you, sir, go ahead, sir.

Cooper: He was often...I remember the first...when I first came here he was very courteous to me. He was always very courteous to people. He would listen to their views, unless he...at times he would get a little irritated because they were so...he could tell he thought they were very prejudiced or biased in their views and were not objective. I was much interested in defense matters having served two years on the Armed Services Committee in '53 and '54. When, after development of sophisticated nuclear weapons where it is so difficult to understand what all these weapons were about, when you were not on the Committee. I would ask him, when he was

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her very strenuously and his was the most powerful examination. He was courteous, dignified, but nevertheless he searched for the truth. I will say that we did not get from her any additional information, but I always believed that Senator Russell thought that she had some fact, not necessarily that...that it was anyone else but Lee Oswald responsible, but...but that he had some feeling that she had not told all the facts. I think that was born out in a statement he made a year or so ago in which he said, as I recall, he had not yet been persuaded that we had all the facts. The most compelling position he took in the Commission was this: there was a question of whether or not the shot which struck President Kennedy or one of the shots, had...had passed through Governor [John] Connally of Texas on the front seat. To...to find that it had passed through both would make the decision somewhat easier in the time frame. It wasn't conclusive. And so there's first...an opinion by most of the Commission that we should say that the shot passed through both President Kennedy and Governor Connally. Governor Connally was a very strong witness. I see now why he has the present opinion in the country that he's a very strong man. He's a very strong witness. He said categorically that he knew it...that the first shot did not pass through him. And he...I remember he said, "I turned my head when I heard the shot. It did come from the direction which you have decided it came from because I'm familiar with firearms. But as I turned again to the left, I felt the impact of another shot." Senator Russell just said, "I'll never sign that report if...if...if this Commission says categorically that the second shot passed through both of them. I agreed with him. I must say he had great influence with me, but I too have been impressed by Governor Connally and so the Commission then did agree that, I cannot recall the exact words, that while there was evidence